

IAEE's Interview with Kristen M. Cauz, MA

IAEE: Describe your business and its history:

KMC: A+ Creative Tutoring is an innovative, personalized comprehensive approach to tutoring to assist students to expand their knowledge, overcome weaknesses, improve study skills, build confidence and achieve academic success. I tutor students in small group or one on one instruction from second grade to college in a variety of subjects including:

- *Math, Reading, Writing, Science, Social Studies
- *Problem Solving and Critical Thinking Skills
- *Organizational and Time Management Skills
- *Special Education Support
- *Test Preparation Skills including: SAT, ACT, SSAT, HSPAT, PSAT
- *Bridging the gap between middle school and high school
- *Bridging the gap between high school and college
- *College Readiness Skills
- *College Admissions advising and application assistance

IAEE: What were some of the forces that encouraged you to develop and market your ideas?

KMC: I started my tutoring business, A+ Creative Tutoring, as a way to supplement my income during my summers off from teaching. I found there was an enormous demand for a program to keep students from suffering from the "Academic Summer Slide." I customized programs for each student to maintain their skills and prepare them for the upcoming school year. In addition, I taught organization, time management, and test taking skills.

Clients from my summer business wanted me to continue to tutor their children during the school year. From this, word of mouth spread and before I knew it I was tutoring four afternoons a week after school. I also conducted specialized tutoring for private high school entrance exams and application assistance. A+ Creative Tutoring continued to grow and I found myself with a waiting list. I hired two experienced tutors to work for me and had them work in two different locations in my house. I created the curriculum for them to follow. This showed me that there was a huge demand for the services I was offering. As much as I enjoyed teaching in elementary classrooms, I found tutoring different age levels and subjects exciting and refreshing. I left the classroom and decided to expand my tutoring business. I hired six additional tutors to work for me. This included expanded services to high school students and providing tutoring in college entrance exam preparation and special education services.

Eventually, when I got married and started a family, I tailored back my business and found the flexibility of tutoring a huge benefit of this type of career. I could set my days

and hours a week according to my schedule, leaving time for my children's school activities and family time.

IAEE: Who encouraged you to pursue your work?

KMC: My children were instrumental in my decision to continue to work for myself as a tutor and move my business to my home. It is a flexible business and allows me time to manage the household, prepare dinner, and/or run a load of laundry while I work, build my schedule around my sons' games. In addition, it is very lucrative and personally rewarding. I see first-hand the results I get with my students and make a good living as well.

IAEE: What were some of the money issues you encountered?

KMC: I haven't really encountered any money issues except problems with cancellations. I collect payment in full on the first of the month for the month following to detract from people cancelling. I have a 24 hour cancellation policy or I receive full payment for the cancellation. This has been difficult for me to enforce with some of the clients I have had for a long time.

IAEE: How do you advertise?

KMC: So far, advertising has been all word-of-mouth.

IAEE: What problems have you encountered in your business?

KMC: School breaks – students going on vacations and not needing tutoring. Student schedule changes due to after school activities. Tutoring hours are the same hours as my kids are out of school. I would prefer working in the mornings when they are attending school.

IAEE: What personal rewards received as an educator did you forfeit when you became an educational entrepreneur?

KMC: I miss collaborating with other educators. I occasionally take classes or do projects with other educators or work at different schools in the area, but I miss having daily contact with other professionals. I also miss having a classroom of enthusiastic students. Every day that I would teach I could go home after school and have at least one funny story to tell about my day.

IAEE: What are you currently working on?

KMC: I am currently expanding my business to offer greater services in the college admission process. I am finding ways to incorporate the financial opportunities that families can find to fund their children's education. I am also designing my own programs for bridging the gap for students from middle school to high school and high school to college.

IAEE: Why do you feel your business has been so successful?

KMC: I feel that I have a great reputation for teaching in our community. This reputation has spread over the years and has fueled my business. I am offering something

different from the “Cookie Cutter” programs that are out there. Each of my students has an individualized tutoring plan. In addition to academic support, I am also a life coach to my students to help them navigate the issues they come across in their daily lives. I help students find the joy of learning each week and others find out about this.

IAEE: What advice do you have for other Educational Entrepreneurs?

KMC: I think a lot of classroom educators feel like they are stuck in the classroom and can't do anything else. I feel like the skill set that classroom teachers possess can be applied to any profession. Teachers are usually organized, punctual, task oriented, critical thinkers, flexible, problem solvers, work well with people and groups, intelligent, multitaskers, and communicate effectively with others. Believe in yourself and know that you have what it takes to start something new. Teachers are amazing people with amazing talents. Now, go out there and get it! You can do it!!!

Remember what skills you have and capitalize on them. Keep your “Day Job” and start working on another idea after school, on weekends, and during breaks. Think about what you want to do 10, 20, and 30 years from now. Will you be happy when you look back on your career? Don't be a could-have, would-have or should-have person!

Find out how taking a leave of absence will affect your tenure and retirement. Is it strategic to wait and work for a couple more years or make a change soon. Plan out the steps and resources you will need to start and execute your new business. Try to find people to help you who have started a similar business.